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ABSTRACT

The two chief approaches to teaching argumentation and invention over the centuries have been first presenting a formal, abstract system, such as logic or topic, then emphasizing audience analysis. Sometimes these have been seen as alternatives, and sometimes as complements. Cursory attention is often paid to the ideal of investigating audience psychology, perhaps quoting Plato's "Phaedrus," but students often end up with a primarily demographic checklist of things to find out about their intended targets such as age, education, and present attitudes. Then they are informed about logic or stock issues. Rarely are the two approaches integrated successfully. According to Boethius, there is a distinction between argumentation and argument. When a belief regarding a matter is in doubt, the argument is the strength, mental content, and sense of argumentation; argumentation is the actual unfolding of the argument by means of discourse. Students should initially be taught the difference between the rhetor's argument and the presentation or argumentation of the thought. This emphasizes from the beginning that argument is psychological and prepares the student for commitment to argument considered cognitively. The paper describes the rationale for teaching the cognitive context of argument and argumentation, presents an example of an approach to value argument, and discusses the role of the unconscious. In helping students to understand their own values, lexical universes, and ways of constructing argumentations, and to pay attention to human psychology and the cognitive context of argument, teachers can assist students in teaching themselves to argue well. (CRH)

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TEACHING THE COGNITIVE CONTEXT OF ARGUMENT

By

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TEACHING THE COGNITIVE CONTEXT OF ARGUMENT

The two chief approaches to teaching argumentation and invention over the centuries have been (1) presentation of a formal, abstract system, such as logic or topics, and (2) emphasis on audience analysis. Sometimes these have been seen as alternatives, and sometimes as complements. Often we pay lip service to the ideal of investigating audience psychology--perhaps quoting Plato (Phaedrus, 271-272)--but end up giving our students a primarily demographic checklist of things to find out about their intended targets (e.g., age, education, present attitudes, etc.). A few days later (or perhaps before), we give our lectures on logic or some sort of topics, such as stock issues. Rarely, I suspect, are we successful in integrating the two approaches. This paper is an example of how a teacher might perform a more thorough-going combination of formal system and informal logic. Neither should be sacrificed in a full treatment of arguing; nor should they be taught separately.

A useful place for us to begin is with Boethius' distinction between "argument" and "argumentation." Though Boethius' work was instrumental in preserving the Aristotelian and Ciceronian topical systems (Bird, 1978, p. 196), and has therefore strongly influenced the rhetorical tradition we all share, I will not insist that his distinction is the only proper one--only that it will serve us here. Boethius says:

> An argument is a reason (ratio) producing belief regarding a matter [that is] in doubt. Argument and argumentation are not the same, however; for the sense (vis sententiae)and the reason enclosed in discourse (oratio) when something [that was] uncertain is demonstrated is called the argument; but the expression (elocutio) of the argument is called the argumentation. So the argument is the strength (virtus), mental content (mens), and the sense of argumentation; argumentation, on

the other hand, is the unfolding of the argument by means of discourse (oratio). (De Topicis Differentiis, I, 1173D 23-32)

So to start with, we should distinguish for our students the rhetor's thought (argument) from his/her presentation of it (argumentation). This emphasizes from the beginning that argument is a psychological thing, and prepares the student for commitment to argument considered cognitively.

Much of my own work concentrates on the argument formed in the mind of the receiver; I have elsewhere called this $argument_0$ (Hample, in press). A full study of argument and argumentation, then, has these three foci: the rhetor's argument, the public argumentation, and the audience's $argument_0$. This view leads to the interpretation of the argumentation as a means or bridge, not an end in itself. What we teach, of course, is skill in argumentation, whether we do so in a speech or composition course; we face, therefore, the inherent danger that students will not recognize the essentially subordinate role of argumentation. This introductory orientation may help combat that risk.

This paper has three main sections. Because of the magnitude of the subtopics, I can only sketch their content, but I assume that each individual instructor will want to flesh things out in his/her own fashion anyway. First I will briefly describe the rationale for teaching the cognitive context of argument and argumentation. Second, I will give an example of how one might wish to approach the important subject of value argument from this general point of view. Finally, I will make a few remarks on the role of the unconscious in argument, and how that delicate body of scholarship might be broached in an introductory course.

Rationale

Why won't a purely formal system do? Why must we bog our students down in the vagaries of individual psychology? The short answer, of course, is that mechanical invention is sterile and ineffectual. But the attraction of formal

logic and topical systems is great enough that perhaps a more detailed answer ought to be given.

Let us begin with a method suggested in the New Rhetoric (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969) and consider a philosophical pair, rational/psychological, as applied to argument theory. By accepting the legitimacy of this contrast, the teacher would be in a position of saying that formal rational systems are distinct from, and ought not be confused with, the psychologies of people. Thus we have this century's philosophers' insistence that the rules of logic are not The Laws of Thought, as Boole (1854) titled his book of the last century. This divorce between logic and marketplace argumentation has been most ably articulated in recent years by Toulmin (1958) and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969). We might also wish to take notice of similar complaints made about topical systems. Clark and Delia (1979, p. 195), for instance, assert that "traditional treatments of topoi are merely catalogues of strategies unconnected to larger conceptual views and bear little systematic relationship to underlying principles by which their relative quality can be assessed." And Stump (1978, p. 178) warns aganist using Aristotle's Topics as a blueprint for invention (though she ends up taking a position somewhat similar to the one I am outlining in this paper). I have myself inveighed against the apparently atheoretical lists of fallacies we have inherited (Hample, 1982), and have suggested a different system.

We are wrong, however, to succumb to the temptation to read rational and psychological as opposites. A better approach is to adopt Brockriede's (1982) figure/ground metaphor, and say that these are matters of emphasis, not contrast. Logic and topoi were and are grounded in human thought. Both systems emerged from a human psychology (that of a single man, in fact) and were based on his observations of other people. Aristotle may well have sharpened his theories of syllogism and dialectic to correspond better to what he thought rational inquiry

should be, but those theories emerged from human discourse and public thinking. And up until this century, these theories have been consistently ratified by Western civilizations's best minds as describing how humans ought to think in order to think well. If a true contrast were justified, the occasional critiques of logic and topics which appeared, mostly from the time of Descartes onward (see his Discourse on Method, II), would have been the majority view almost instantly. Logic pervades current cognitive science (see Hample, 1979; 1983), even if the theorists are not explicit about it. And topical systems specific to contemporary American society are being enthusiastically developed by speech communication scholars (e.g., Clark & Delia, 1979; Goodwin & Wenzel, 1979; Wiseman & Schenck - Hamlin, 1981). That these topical systems are not identical to traditional theories of topoi or stases is an interesting result, but not one which should delay us here.

If rational/psychological is not a true contrast, then neither is artificial/empirical. I will not, of course, deny that the classical systems have often been described as artificial. There are several possible explanations for that feeling: (1) the systems may never have had much to do with human thought; (2) the systems may once have been empirically grounded, but have now lost their phenomenal grasp; or (3) we teach the systems unsubtly. I think the third possibility is the most likely, but my impression is that most opponents of the classical systems assume that one of the first two explanations is the correct one. If the systems do not work, we ought to revise them and perhaps abandon part or all of the classical theories. But we ought not believe that because one specific set of topoi feels artificial, the whole idea of topoi or stases is wrong-headed. Furthermore, if the systems are taught with attention to their need for empirical grounding, I believe that the feelings of artificiality will dissipate. Topoi ought not be approached as checklists. If they are useful at all, they should be taught as empirical propositions about audiences.

A teacher who has only a short time in which to teach argumentation would be better advised to omit mention of a system than to present it as a formal one. By taking the time to elicit arguments from a class given a sample problem, the teacher ought to be able (with some well-informed categorizing, of course) to show the class that their suggestions resemble the ancient categories. The portions of the old system for which the students produce no appropriate examples can then be introduced to complete the students' system. In that way, their naive theories of persuasion can be sharpened and educated into the more sophisticated systems of our rhetorical theories. This can be done most conveniently by means of a class discussion, but a dedicated teacher could cull apposite examples from students' themes or speeches, if desired. This latter suggestion presumes that the students will be encouraged to do some undisciplined arguing in advance of the teacher's introduction of the logical or topical system, of course, but that is a realistic estimate of what probably happens after a teacher's dry presentation of the classical topoi or stases, anyway.

These pedagogical suggestions are in line with rhetorical theory. Boethius defined argument psychologically, not formally: "An argument is a reason producing belief regarding something which is in doubt" (I, 1180C 18-19; see Stump, 1978, p. 189). We also have Ochs' (1982, p. 109) assessment that for Cicero, topics were "kinds of thinking processes" and that a locus was "something which contains a reasoning process." And certainly Aristotle's link between argument and audience is well known (Rhetoric, I.1; see Arnhart, 1981; Humphrey, 1983). A number of contemporary argumentation theorists have made similar remarks. Mulderig (1982) shows how Bain integrated psychology with what we are here calling argumentation; Willard (1976, p. 313) says that an argument is essentially a psychological phenomenon; Burleson (1981) insists that the study of human reasoning processes is fundamental to an understanding of argument; and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca

(1969) study arguments in terms of the mind's adherence to theses. My own wish to view argument as cognition is phrased a bit more radically than is the norm, but moves to the same end (Hample, in press; 1981).

This portion of the paper has been intended to show that the cognitive context ought to be intertwined with formal systems in our teaching. The next two sections may serve as examples of how one might pursue that aim.

Argument In The Realm of Value

How to deal with value propositions has long been a central concern for philosophers and argument theorists. Some important recent work by Wenzel (1977) and Fisher (1978; 1980) has produced systems of analysis which could be adapted to supply sets of topoi or stases for values. However, neither takes a particularly empirical approach. What would a cognitive pedagogy of value argument look like?

It would begin with a commitment to naive theories of value. What philosophers believe justifies the movement from is to ought matters only insofar as it corresponds to what the audience thinks will serve as rationale. And the rhetor will probably be guided largely (perhaps unconsciously, as the next section may illustrate) by what he or she perceives as a warrant.

As nearly everyone recognizes, warrants (Toulmin, 1958; Hample, 1977) are the key--how can one get from evidence to claim? Value warrants may be considered to be operationalized as correlations between value terms. If a person thinks that intelligence and good character "go together," a survey questionnaire can be used to generate measures of the strength of that "going together." This can be done technically, with all the features of good empirical design, or it can be done informally, as part of a class discussion. Let me describe both procedures.

In a research study, the experimenter could give subjects several vignettes of people--a variety of target people and descriptions is important. The people can be real or fictional. Subjects would read the evaluative paragraphs, which

would contain perhaps half a dozen value terms (e.g., "Marlene was invariably helpful to her roommates, but treated her boyfriends like dirt"). After reading the descriptions, respondents would then rate the target persons (e.g., Marlene) on a large number of semantic differential scales. The scales should be chosen to represent the evaluation dimension of semantic meaning (Osgood, Suci & Tannenbaum, 1957), and should include, but not be restricted to, the terms used in the vignette. By a correlational analysis of the whole sample's responses, the experimenter could discover which value terms were associated with one another. A statistically more complex, but perhaps more useful, technique is to factor analyse the results. This general design has been executed frequently (e.g., Norman, 1963; Bruni & Eysenck, 1976; Di Vesta, 1966; Snyder & Wiggens, 1970; Ohnmacht, 1965; for a general introduction to personality-related associations, see Wegner & Vallacher, 1977). Based on this sort of research, the teacher could explain, for instance, that (based on Snyder & Wiggens, 1970, p. 461) drunkenness is strongly linked to weakness, but not to masculinity.

The abstractness of this sort of audience analysis can be reinforced (or replaced) by a less disciplined classroom demonstration. The teacher might begin by eliciting a number of positive and negative terms his/her students regard as important in describing a person (or any other category of noun). Students might suggest, let us say, good, generous, honest and happy as positive terms, and drug-ridden, lazy and frigid as negative terms (the lists should be longer--perhaps ten terms of each kind). The teacher could then put the terms on a blackboard in matrix form (i.e., with the whole list vertically and the whole list horizontally). Then, for each cell of the lower trianglular matrix, the teacher could ask for a show of hands--"How many of you think that this term (generous) nearly always describes the same people as this term (lazy)?" "How many of you think it almost always goes with the opposite?" The first question will elicit positive associations, and the second negative ones. A summary measure of strength of association,

(perhaps the difference between the two answers, expressed as a percentage of the class and preceded by a plus or minus, as appropriate) should then be entered into the matrix on the blackboard. At the end of the exercise, the class will have generated an implicit theory of value--the students will have said which value terms can serve as proof or disproof for the others. Presumably, the positive terms will tend to be associated with one another, and negative terms with themselves. This will impress no one. But the strength of association will show which value terms serve as the strongest evidence for one another, and this has considerable rhetorical importance.

Whether the interrelationships are shown by the class exercise, or are introduced in lecture as the results of careful experimentation, the class will have a set of value topoi. A student assigned to prove that his/her university is a fine one can now begin the inventional process by asking (let us assume these were the results of an exercise on valuing educational institutions) if the university is conveniently situated, socially exciting, well regarded in the business community, and so forth. Students should find that these subordinate questions yield a more concrete start on an essay or speech than the general question, "Is my school any good?"

An alternate instructional approach is to make the assignment without much help of this kind, and then have the class identify the value links they assumed in their persuasive efforts. Those links can be collated to generate a crude matrix of the sort described above. Then a similar assignment can be given, so that students can (one hopes) see the difference between proceeding instinctively or with the aid of a topical system.

Another step the teacher may take is to guide the class in a discussion of the types of evidence which are appropriate for particular kinds of value propositions. Joseph Wenzel and I (1975) have done a study in which we discovered that

undergraduates are sensitive to some very general domains of values--public concerns versus private issues, and obligations versus free choices, for instance. Each kind of issue admits some kinds of evidence (e.g., claims of duty) and is less vulnerable to others (self-interest, perhaps). The teacher might wish to conduct a crude replication of this study by providing the class with a list of value statements and asking the class to put them together into categories. Each category should be described abstractly and given a label. Then discussion would focus on types of statements which could be used to sustain each type of claim. This ought to provide even more detailed guidance in generating relevant proofs of value propositions.

These sorts of teaching strategies should result in empirically-grounded sets of value topoi or stases. They might or might not resemble the ancient lists or the modern ones suggested by Fisher and Wenzel. The instructor dedicated to one or another of those systems can probably direct discussion into those channels. Or the teacher may prefer to loose the class on value argument with fewer restraints. Either way, the classroom treatments will have defined the cognitive context of value argumentation for the students, whether they are regarded as audience or rhetors. With minor adaptations, these procedures can be adapted to factual and policy questions as well. What I most wish to stress here is the general idea--of having the students see the empirical groundings of topoi, whether for values or any other kind of issue.

Unconscious Arguing

In this final section, I wish to approach a topic which is at once essential and ephemeral--the role of the unconscious in arguing. By "unconscious" I do not mean to conjure up the psychodynamic panoply of repressions, displacements, transferences, and so forth, although these might well be interesting items for a class to discuss. Instead, I mean only to contrast articulable awareness

(consciousness) with tacit knowledge (unconsciousness).

A moment's reflection should show that nearly every important process in arguing is done without conscious awareness. Even when we are aware of searching for an argument to use, we are not always conscious of why we chose it, why or how the different possiblities "came to mind," or what impulse led us to a certain phrasing. Even though an inventional effort may be guided by an over-arching purpose, very few of the details are worked out purposively or consciously. Certainly, we can often justify our choice of a particular argument or phrase after the fact, but that is a long way from indicating conscious awareness during the process (see Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Ericsson & Simon, 1980). If we were all as good at arguing as we are at breathing, this would pose no problems. But in fact, one of the reasons for teaching argumentation should be to objectify and improve natural (unconscious) inclinations.

I do not mean to say that we can, or should, try to illumine everything that goes on while we are thinking. Genung's (1904, pp. 406-407) advice is still sound:

> Given a mind trained as above described, with habits steadied to trusty and permanent pace..., much may be left, much had better be left, to that strange power which the mind has of working subconsciously. In many cases when the train of thought is started, instead of punishing the brain to worry out the whole problem, the best way is to leave it to itself, and when next the subject is recalled a remarkable advance and clearing-up will be found to have taken place.

The failure of the decades-long project to program computers to understand and produce normal human discourse is sufficiently clear evidence that (at least for now) there are firm limits on what is teachable (see Haugeland, 1981). Our problem is to decide what preliminary training ought to be given.

Whether we are concerned with the rhetor or the audience, we must respect the energies of the unconscious. As Longinus (On the Sublime, XV, 11) observed centuries ago, "our nature is drawn towards that which affects it most powerfully: hence an image lures us away from an argument: judgment is paralysed, matters of fact disappear from view, eclipsed by the superior blaze." Two important therapists express the same idea in a more restrained way: "Most literary devices are actually means of initiating unconscious searches and processes to evoke multiple levels of meaning" (Erickson & Rossi, 1979, p. 49).

How is it that the form of argumentation affects the audience's argument? Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, esp. sec. 41) have written clearly about the argumentative force of figurative language. I have made a modest contribution to this general topic myself (Hample, 1982), and Leff (1983) has recently given us a very provoking essay. But to be honest, I think we do not know very much about this subject. What we should do in class is to emphasize the subordinate role of argumentation, as Boethius defined it for us earlier, and discuss the meaning rather than the charm of stylistic devices. Spearman's (1930, p. 23) third fundamental principle of cognition, the principle of correlates, states: "When any item and a relation to it are present to mind, then the mind can generate in itself another item so related." When a student describes the Democratic Party as "bathtub slime," we should discuss first the train of associations this will naturally evoke, and only later the cleverness or propriety of the description (and these in terms of audience reaction, not objective standards). Useful discussions might center around the questions of whether the associates stimulated the rhetor to produce the metaphor in the first place (if not, where did it come from?), and how much the metaphor does to advance the student's proof.

That language reveals the rhetor is, of course, a commonplace, but one worth classroom discussion. The teacher ought to try to bring unconscious assumptions

about communication into the light. In addition to focusing on language choices, some broader issues might also be raised, possibly by asking the student to perform some unusual communicative tasks. One which comes immediately to mind is trying to persuade someone from a non-western culture. Clark and Delia (1979, p. 188) state a fundamental assumption of communication theorists when they remark that "Communicative episodes are organized within alternative systems of deeply tacit schemes of expectation acquired in acculturation." Not only will the values of people from different cultures differ, but so will their understandings of how to communicate. Gumperz, Aulakh and Kaltman (1982, pp. 49-52) indicate that natives of India do not sequence the parts of a discourse as we do; they interweave all the ideas together, instead of treating them one at a time. Young (1982) reports that Chinese speakers of English consistently present evidence and reasons first in an argumentation, refusing to state their point until the end. Controlled experience in such situations, combined with an instructor-led debriefing of both the American and the foreign student, might lead our pupils to appreciate an important result of sociolinguistic work:

> When backgrounds differ, meetings can be plagued by misunderstanding, mutual misrepresentations of events and misevaluations. It seems that, in intergroup encounters, judgments of performance and of ability that on the whole are quite reliable when people share the same background may tend to break down. Interactions that are normally seen as routine often meet with unforeseen problems. Accepted strategies of persuasion and argumentation may no longer be successful. (Gumperz & Cook - Gumperz, 1982, p. 2)

Making the routine strange may help our students to evaluate their unconscious assumptions, and to make their routines more flexible.

I am proposing, therefore, a program of self-articulation. We should help our students to understand their own values, their own lexical universes, their own ways of constructing argumentations. All these require, at bottom, a thorough-going attention to human psychology, to the cognitive context of argumentation. If we do this expertly and subtly, we will have led our students to teach themselves to argue well.

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